

State Dept. Admits Loss Of H-Bomb Over Spain

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The State Department—unleashed by Spain — finally acknowledged yesterday that one of America's H-bombs has been missing on or just off Spain's southeastern coast since Jan. 17.

Breaking 44 days of official silence, the State Department issued a statement confirming all the hitherto secret details about the incident appearing in a recent series in The Washington Post.

The statement said that the search for the missing H-bomb is continuing. It noted, too, that high explosives in two of the four unarmed weapons that fell on Palomares, Spain, from a crippled B-52 bomber exploded upon impact, scattering radioactive material. There was no nuclear explosion and radiation health experts have "obtained no evidence of a health hazard."

Health experts, said State Department spokesman Robert J. McCloskey, see no danger "from eating vegetables

marketed in this area, from eating the meat or fish or drinking the milk of animals."

Nonetheless, the United States is shipping some soil and vegetation from Palomares to preclude any possibility, however remote, of a public health or safety hazard," as the Atomic Energy Commission put it.

The AEC said yesterday that roughly 1500 cubic yards of contaminated earth and vegetation would be shipped back to the United States for interment at the radioactive waste burial dump at the AEC's Savannah River facilities near Aiken, S.C.

The contaminated Spanish soil and vegetation will be packed in 55-gallon drums — about 5000 of them.

The State Department's statement yesterday followed an unexpected announcement on Tuesday by a Spanish atomic official in Madrid that hydrogen weapons had fallen

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near Palomares and contaminated topsoil was being removed to the United States.

Up until this announcement, Spain had dropped an almost impenetrable curtain of silence over the Palomares incident and the United States had gone along with the silence, though many officials here were unhappy with the excessive secrecy.

The picture has so changed now, however, that America's Ambassador to Spain, Angler Biddle Duke, plans to take his family to Palomares for a swim off the coast. Duke will be accompanied by Spain's Minister of Information and Tourism, Manuel Fraga Iribarne, and his family.

The planned Spanish-American splash is to demonstrate that there is no danger to swimmers from radio-activity.